

(19) REPUBLIC OF FRANCE (11) Publication n° :
 _____ (to be used for reproduction
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NATIONAL INSTITUTE (21) National registration n°: 2 749 263
 OF INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY

PARIS

(51) Int Cl⁶ : B 62 D 21/15

(12) **PATENT APPLICATION** A1

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| (22) Filing date : 31.05.96 | (71) Applicant(s) : RENAULT SOCIETE ANONYME - FR |
| (30) Priority : | |
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| (43) Date of public availability of the application : 05.12.97 Bulletin 97/49 | |
| (56) List of documents cited in the preliminary search report : See end of this specification | |
| (60) References to other related national documents : | (73) Holder(s) : |
| | (74) Agent(s) : RENAULT |

(54) REINFORCED STRUCTURAL MEMBER AND FABRICATION PROCESS

(57) Reinforced structural member formed by an outer hollow body (20) wherein the inside walls delineate a chamber for filling with a material such as foam, characterised in that the filling chamber (23) contains a ribbed internal element (25) which delineates foam-filled cavities (30) formed in contact with the internal element and limited by said inside walls (20i) of the outer element (20).



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REINFORCED STRUCTURAL MEMBER AND FABRICATION PROCESS

The invention relates to a reinforced structural member and its fabrication process.

More precisely, the invention relates to a reinforced structural member designed
5 for use in road vehicles, wherein the internal walls of a hollow body delineate a
chamber for filling with a material such as foam.

- According to publication DE-U-1983413, a vehicle is known wherein the vehicle
structure incorporates an energy-absorbing element extending over the width of
the vehicle and which is formed by a hollow body that is U-shaped in cross-
10 section and whose opposing limbs are aligned horizontally. The hollow body is
filled with a plastic foam. However, this method of construction presents the
drawback that the hollow body has only limited rigidity. The limbs of the hollow
body thus formed warp under the effect of relatively small forces, so that its
ability to absorb energy by deformation is insufficient.
- 15 Pursuant to these considerations, the object of the invention it to provide a
reinforced structural member with a high degree of rigidity. Not only must its
fabrication be simple, but it must also be possible to adapt the proposed
reinforcement to different configurations of structural members having regard to
their cross-section and location.
- 20 To achieve this objective, according to the invention, the filling chamber of the
structural member contains a ribbed internal rigid element which delineates foam-
filled cavities formed on contact with the internal element and limited by the walls
of the outer element.
- 25 The invention has the advantage of being suitable for use with hollow bodies of
limited strength forming part of a lightweight structure or chassis.

The invention also has the advantage that it is capable of being fitted to certain sections of the vehicle structure or chassis supporting the bodywork of said vehicle.

The principal advantage of the invention lies in the fact that a structural member
5 and its filling provide a means of obtaining a force-transmitting element independently of the shape of the structural member. The structural member thus makes it possible to locally increase the rigidity of said structure.

Construction of the structural member is particularly simple and is realised simply by heating the internal element, causing a foam product to expand thereby
10 encapsulating and immobilising said internal element and bonding the foam product to the inside walls of the outer element.

Other characteristics and advantages of the invention will become apparent in the course of the following description with reference to the attached drawing given solely by way of example, in which :

- 15 - figure 1 is a view in elevation of a road vehicle body whereon possible locations of the structural member according to the invention are shown by way of non-limitative example.
- figure 2 is a perspective view of the internal reinforcement.
- figures 3 and 4 are sectional views of the structural member on line IV-IV in
20 figure 1 respectively before and after expansion of the foam material.

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the body 10 of a road vehicle mounted on a subframe 11. On the subframe 11, reference 12 designates the bottom rail of which the shaded sections 13 and 14 are, by way of non-limitative examples, composed of structural members according to the invention.

As illustrated in figure 3 or 4, a hollow outer element 20 is composed of a U-shaped section 21 of which the flanged top edges form a welding rim in contact with a closure plate 22.

The inside walls 20i of the element 20 delineate a filling chamber 28.

- 5 According to the invention, a reinforcing member composed of the ribbed element 25 carries the unexpanded foam product 24. The reinforcement 25 is inserted into the chamber 28 and is connected rigidly to the closure plate 22. The assembly thus formed is fitted together and welded, according to figure 4, to form a hollow body with the U-shaped section 21.
- 10 The assembly thus formed allows free passage 23 for pickling and surface treatment products before curing, and therefore permits self-cleaning of the inside wall 20i of the section 21.

The reinforcement 25 consists of a profile made of heat-conducting material such as cast aluminium, magnesium, etc... of which the ribs 26, 27 and 35 are oriented towards the inside wall 20i of the outer element 20. These ribs which delineate cavities 30 filled with foam facilitate the diffusion of heat when a heat source is applied to produce a temperature rise sufficient to cause the foam product to expand and bond to the inner wall 20i (figure 4) during treatment of the rail 12 and the reinforcement 25 during the passage of the vehicle assembly through 20 curing ovens.

The envisaged expansion of the foam substantially triples its initial volume. The reinforcement 25 ensures that sufficient heat energy is simultaneously applied to uniformly expand the foam product along the necessary portion of the section 21 and locally strengthen the latter by bonding the reinforcement 25 inside said section 21 by means of the foam material.

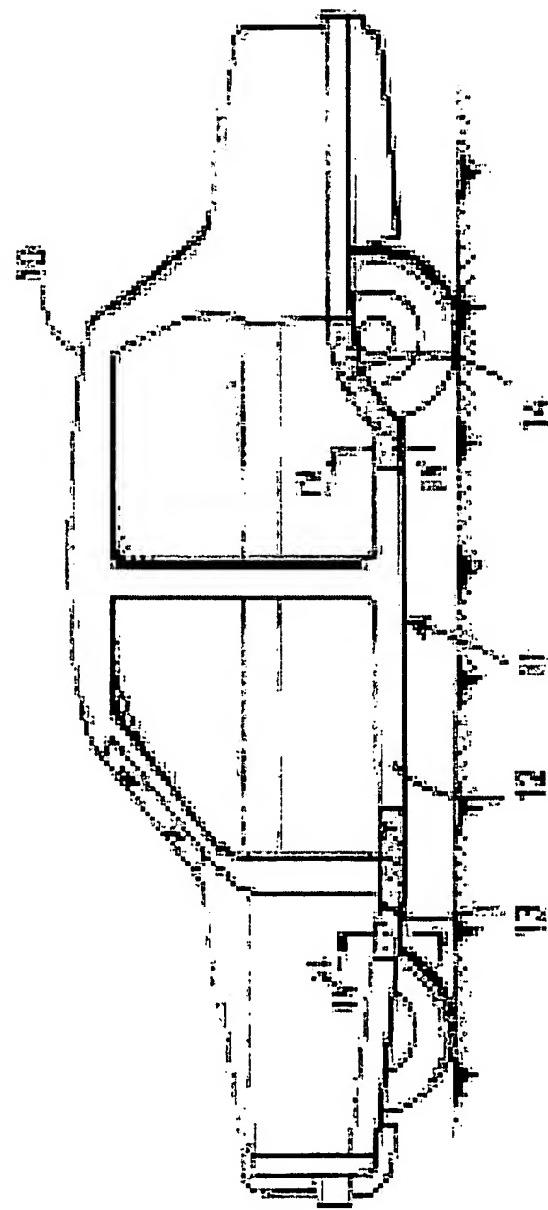
C L A I M S

- 5 1) Reinforced structural member formed by an outer hollow body (20) wherein
the inside walls delineate a chamber for filling with a material such as foam,
characterised in that the filling chamber (23) contains a ribbed internal
element (25) which delineates foam-filled cavities (30) formed in contact with
the internal element and limited by said inside walls (20i) of the outer element
10 (20).
- 2) Structural member according to claim 1, characterised in that the internal
element (25) incorporates ribs (26, 27, 35) oriented towards the inside walls
(20i) of the outer element (20).
- 15 3) Structural member according to claim 2, characterised in that the ribs (26, 27,
35) of the internal element (25) are carried on a strengthening element in cast
aluminium.
- 20 4) Fabrication process for the reinforced structural member according to any of
claims 1, 2 or 3, characterised in that a reinforcing member (25) carrying a
foam product (24) is inserted into a filling chamber (28) allowing free passage
for surface treatment products, and sufficient heat is applied to expand the
foam product and bond it to the inner surfaces (20i) of the outer hollow body
(20) as the vehicle assembly is passing through the curing ovens.

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FIG. 1



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FIG. 2

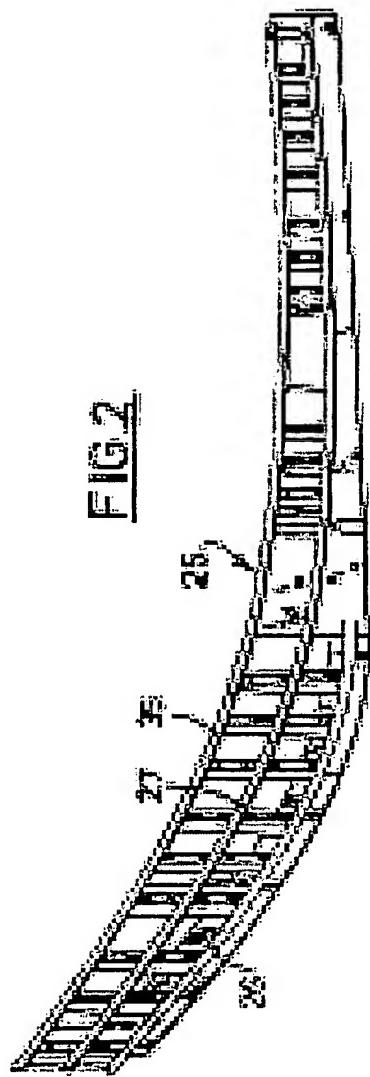


FIG. 4

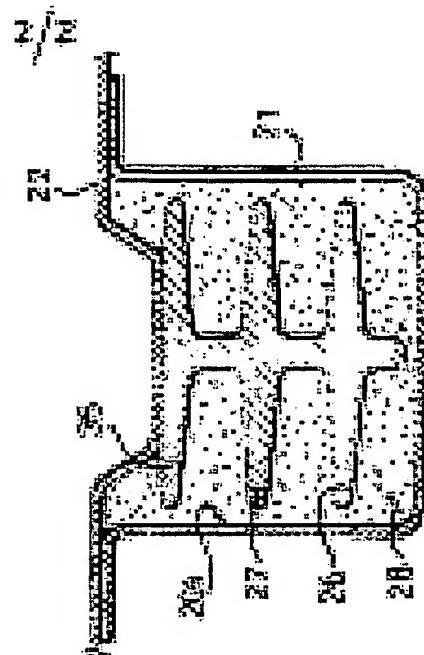
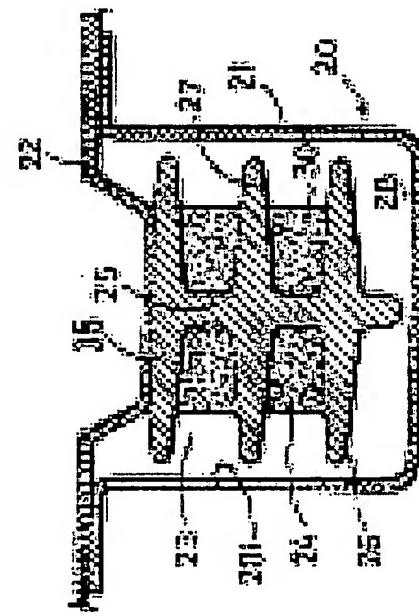


FIG. 3



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PRELIMINARY SEARCH
REPORT

2749263

National registration
numberNATIONAL INSTITUTE
of
INDUSTRIAL PROPERTYprepared on the basis of the latest claims filed prior to
commencement of the search

FA 528873

FR 9606714

| DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED PERTINENT | | Claims concerned in the application examined |
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| | | B62D |
| Date search completed | | Examiner |
| 6 November 1996 | | Hageman, L |
| CATEGORY OF DOCUMENTS CITED | | |
| X : particularly pertinent in itself | T : theory or principle on which the invention is based | |
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